

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 12, 2013

Agenda Item: 2013-14 Helena Urban Deer Management

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background

In 2003, the Montana Legislature authorized cities to create plans to control wildlife to address public health and safety within city limits. Such plans must be approved by the FWP Commission. The City of Helena subsequently developed an Urban Deer Management Plan seeking to initially remove 350 deer to achieve an objective of 25 deer per square mile. FWP completed a third programmatic environmental assessment in 2009 that confirmed objectives and methods relative to urban deer management in Helena. Within the plan, any take/removal of deer requires approval on an annual basis. To date, a total of 670 deer have been removed, including 140 removed during the latest removal effort in 2013. FWP does not contribute staff or resources to actual removal efforts. Any quotas do not apply to individual deer removed under urgent public-safety situations.

Survey data are collected and analyzed annually in October. Subsequently, the city, in cooperation with the local FWP biologist, establishes a level of take, which is presented to the F&W Commission as a proposal in November and finalized in December, when take efforts are authorized to begin. The take authorization last year was valid through Dec. 31, 2013, with a no-take period extending from April 1 through Nov. 14, 2013.

Survey data were collected during October and the analysis was recently completed. The data revealed an estimate of approximately 14 deer per square mile within the City of Helena. This is down from the previous estimate of 34 deer per square mile last year. Because of survey conditions and potential distribution changes, it's likely that the actual abundance is somewhat higher. The estimate was similarly low in 2010, and that prompted a low removal (26 deer), resulting in a jump to 32 deer per square mile the subsequent year. To avoid that outcome, FWP is proposing a removal of up to 70 deer, in addition to the 60 remaining on the authorization from last year, for a total proposed maximum take of 130 deer. It is anticipated that this removal will result in a fall 2014 population at or below 25 deer per square mile. Proposed methods will be identical to those employed previously (trap and lethal removal).

Public Involvement Process & Results

The City of Helena conducted extensive public involvement in developing its plan and the previous urban deer EAs. FWP provided separate 30-day public comment periods. Public support has been split throughout these earlier processes. Public comment on this proposal extended through 5 p.m., Monday Dec. 9. As of Dec. 3, FWP received 30 comments. Support exceeded opposition, and some expressed advocacies for hunting or translocation. Any additional comments will be handed to Commissioners at the Dec. 12 meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposal may be adopted as proposed, with adjustment, with additions, or with deletions as per staff justifications, public comment and/or Commission discussion.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the final 2013 - 2014 take of urban deer by the City of Helena as presented by city staff and FWP.